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HISTORICAL ADDRESS

Read at the

200th ANNIVERSARY

of

THE TOWN OF PLYMPTON,

AUGUST 8, 1907,

by

JOHN SHERMAN.

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HISTORICAL ADDRESS

The Indian name for Plympton was Winnetuxet. The first settlements were made between 1670 and 1680.

It was originally a part of Plymouth and so remained until 1695, when the number of families in the western part of the old town had increased to 45, and the difficulty of attending public worship had become so serious that a petition was sent to the General Court for the incorporation of a new precinct. There was some opposition by the old town, but notwithstanding, the result was that the prayer of the petitioners was granted and a portion of the western part of the old town, containing thirty-six thousand, five hundred and six acres was set apart and incorporated as the western precinct of Plymouth. This western precinct was incorporated into a town by act of the General Court, June 4, 1707, by the name of Plympton.

The first town meeting was held in March, 1708, when William Shurtleff was chosen Town Clerk, and Caleb Loring, Samuel Sturtevant and Benoni Lucas were chosen selectmen.

One of the first acts of the new town was relating to schools; and the selectmen were instructed to hire a schoolmaster, and this vote was repeated for a number of years.

At a town meeting held in February, 1709, the selectmen reported a list of 65 inhabitants qualified to vote in town meetings.

At a town meeting held at Plymouth, March 16, 1702, it was voted that thirty acres of land be laid forth for the use of the ministry in the upper Society, and a conveniency for a burying place and training place as near the meeting house as may be convenient.

This thirty acres was laid out April 23, 1702, by William Shurtleff and Samuel Sturtevant, surveyors.

This thirty six thousand, five hundred and six acres of land remained intact until 1726, when thirteen hundred and six acres were annexed to the new town of Kingston, incorporated that year.

In 1734, five thousand, nine hundred and ninety-four acres

were taken by the act incorporating the town of Halifax and made a part of the new town, and subsequently in 1831 another slice of four hundred and ninety-seven acres was annexed to the town of Halifax.

In 1731 the inhabitants of the southern part of the town petitioned the General Court to be set off as a separate precinct to be known as the southern precinct of Plympton.

That petition was granted with the provision that the petitioners pay one third part of the aged and Rev. Isaac Cushman's salary during his life, and that the ministerial lands belonging to the old town, shall still solely remain to them, and the new precinct to have none of the issues and profits thereof. In 1790, June 9th, this tract of land, comprising twenty thousand and seventy-five acres, was incorporated as a town by the name of Carver.

By these several cessions of land the territory of the town of Plympton has been reduced to eight thousand, six hundred and thirty-four acres.

CHURCH BUILDINGS.

The first meeting house in Plympton was probably built sometime between 1695 and before the Rev. Isaac Cushman was ordained, which was Oct. 27, 1698; and stood on the common or green opposite the lane that leads eastward down to the dwelling house of Benjamin Soule, what is now better known as the "Terry Place."

This meeting house becoming too small to accommodate the increasing number of attendants, was sold to Mr. Benjamin Soule, who took it away and converted it into a barn, and the town voted, Sept. 16, 1714, to build the second meeting house, which was used for public worship in the year 1716.

This second meeting house stood on the green opposite where Union Hall now stands. It fronted the south and had three outside doors.

It was quite a large meeting house, as it must of necessity have been, considering that the people living in the present limits of Plympton, and all of Carver, about three-fourths of Halifax, and a part of Kingston, up to 1726, attended meeting here.

The walls on the inside were plastered, but it was not plastered overhead and there was no garret floor. It was taken down in 1772, after having been used for a meeting house 56 years.

The third meeting house in Plympton was built in 1772. There was some contention as to where it should be located, and it was finally left to a committee from some of the neighboring towns to fix a place; and the said committee, after viewing the town, decided to locate it on the green or common, about 12 rods north of the old one and about where the Soldier's Monument now stands. It fronted the west, and was 57 feet long and 45 feet wide. The pulpit was on the east side of the house. It had 45 pews on the lower floor and twenty-six in the galleries. This third meeting house was plastered throughout and overhead.

It had fifty windows. Each wall pew had a window. It had no steeple and no bell. This house was taken down in the spring of 1830, having been used for the purposes of a meeting house fifty-eight years. The town meetings were also held in the meeting house up to this time.

In the years 1828 and 1829 the first Parish in Plympton was much divided in opinion as to repairing the then meeting house or to building a new one.

A majority of the Parish was in favor of building a new one, but the difference in opinion as to where it should be located was so great that nothing was done. But in the winter of 1829-30, a sufficient number of subscribers were obtained through the efforts of Dea. Cephas Bumpus, for the building a new meeting house in forty-eight shares, and it was decided to locate it on a lot given by Jonathan Parker, Esq., opposite the green near the burial ground. These proprietors bought the old meeting house for \$652, which was the appraisal made by disinterested parties from out of town.

The contractor was Mr. Whittemore Peterson, of Duxbury, at a cost of \$3,364, cost of bell, \$386; total, \$3,750.

This meeting house was completed and dedicated, Wednesday, Sept. 29, 1830; at which time eight hundred people were present, and the bell was rung for the meeting, it being the first time a bell was ever rung in Plympton for a religious meeting. October 3, 1830, was the first time a meeting was held in the new meeting house on the Sabbath, and at which time, more than two hundred and sixty persons were present.

Some time during the summer of 1856 this meeting house was struck by lightning and damaged to a considerable extent, after which it was repaired, remodelled on the inside, and a new spire and other repairs on the outside.

In 1838 some fire stoves were placed in the vestry and Dec.

23, 1838, was the first Sabbath that ever a meeting house in Plympton was warmed by a fire stove.

Some few years ago through the liberality of Mrs. Pierce, of Middleboro, other alterations and repairs were made on the outside of this meeting house.

The Rev. Isaac Cushman, the first minister in Plympton, was ordained October 27, 1698, he having preached some three years before he was ordained.

He died in Plympton, October 21, 1732.

His dwelling house stood forty-five and one third rods north of the burial place and fourteen rods east of the road.

Rev. Jonathan Parker, the second minister in Plympton, was ordained December 22, 1731, as colleague with Mr. Cushman. His ministry continued up to the time of his death, which occurred April 24, 1776, a period of nearly forty-five years.

His dwelling house stood on the west side of the road, on the site on which the house of the late Gilbert H. Randall now stands, and which was torn down within the memory of many of us.

Rev. Ezra Sampson, the third minister in Plympton, was ordained February 15, 1775, and was dismissed by the town, at his request April 4, 1796, after twenty-one years.

His dwelling house stands on the east side of the green, opposite this church, and that and one acre of land for a house lot were given to him by the Parish for a settlement.

Rev. Ebenezer Withington, the fourth minister in Plympton, was ordained January 31, 1798, and was dismissed July 21, 1801.

Rev. John Briggs, the fifth minister, was installed December 2, 1801, and resigned June 29, 1807.

The Parish gave him one acre of land on the west side of the green, on which he built the house now owned and occupied by Mrs. Emily Walton.

Rev. Elijah Dexter, the sixth minister, was ordained January 18, 1809, and resigned in April, 1851, after a ministry of forty-two years. He died October 10, 1851.

He bought the dwelling house of the Rev. John Briggs, where he lived during the first part of his ministry here and where the Rev. Henry M. Dexter was born. He afterward exchanged this place for the one he occupied during the latter part of his ministry and where he died. Now owned and occupied by the heirs of the late Ephraim Fuller.

For the most of the time up to the year 1827, the town and

precinct or parish acted together as one, and the two were identical. The town settled the ministers, appropriated their salaries and built and kept in repair their churches. In that year, on the 16th day of April, the town in its parochial capacity reorganized as the First Parish of Plympton, under the laws then in force, and became distinct from the town in its municipal capacity.

It began to be found very difficult to collect the parish taxes without compulsion and no parish tax was made after 1833, and what money was raised was secured by voluntary subscription. In 1843, the embarrassments of the parish became so great that it was voted to sell the parsonage land for the payment of the arrearages and other necessary expenses, which was done by leave of the General Court passed in 1844. Thus passed out of the hands of the parish, the whole grant made by the town of Plymouth, except what was given for a burial ground and training place; two acres having been previously given for house lots to the Rev. Ezra Sampson and the Rev. John Briggs.

The land devoted to a burying place contains one acre, three quarters, and twenty-two rods.

At a meeting held by the inhabitants of the New Society in the Western Precinct of Plymouth on the 30th day of May, 1706, said inhabitants did agree with Benjamin Soule and Isaac Cushman to clear one acre of the land that lieth for the burying place and subdue it for four pounds, and to have it offset in the Minister's rate yearly till they are paid.

This burying place was the only one in the old town used for the burial of the dead, except one small one at the north, for about one hundred and fifty years.

The Green contains about three acres, three quarters and twenty-eight rods. This includes the highway lying along the westerly side also.

A part of the green was originally fenced on the westerly side, and the Rev. Jonathan Parker improved a field thereon, extending from the burying ground nearly to where the soldier's monument now stands.

His barn also stood in this field on the westerly side near the fence.

The fence of this field was taken away in 1776 and that barn was moved across the road on to the Rev. Mr. Parker's lot.

Beside the first three meeting houses which stood on the green, the first school house, of which we have any record, also stood near the southerly end of the green, opposite the lot on which in

after time the dwelling house of the Rev. John Briggs was built. That school house fronted the south, it was not ceiled nor plastered, and had a garret floor laid with loose boards and pretty large cracks between them.

On the east side of the green and south of the lane that leads down to the "Terry Place" was a row of large trees, two white oaks and four red oaks. On the west side of the green and within in the small triangle formed by the road coming from Dunham's Neck, and the road running north and south, there was a very large red oak tree.

Some time after the Revolution these trees were cut down.

On the east side of the green, and near where the dwelling house of Mrs. William S. Soule now stands, there were a Whipping Post and Stocks, but there is no record of any person ever being publicly whipped.

It was the custom of the people of Plympton, before they had a minister, to attend meeting at Plymouth and men and women went thither on foot. It is related that one time there was a wedding at Plymouth, where the bride belonged, and the bridegroom belonged in Barnstable.

He walked to Plymouth and some others with him, among whom was a young woman. After the marriage was solemnized, that young woman requested the company to excuse her absence, for she wanted to just step over to Middleboro and see Cousin Patience, and that she would return next day and join them on their return to Barnstable.

She walked from Barnstable to Plymouth, and then to Middleboro, besides attending the wedding at Plymouth.

Before and during the revolutionary war the attitude of the people of Plympton was that of intense loyalty to the patriot cause.

In the year 1774, the year before the war of the revolution commenced, a Liberty Pole was erected where the second meeting house stood.

The main shaft of this Liberty Pole was hewed into squares and was more than one foot in diameter.

It had braces from the cross sills which were in the ground up to the main shaft, about five or six feet from the ground. A slate stone in the shape of a heart, with an inscription on it was fastened a little above the braces, the import of which was that "Liberty was much at heart."

At a town meeting held July 11, 1774, it was voted not to pur-

chase or consume any goods of any kind imported from Great Britain, after the first day of October next, until our liberties are restored, by a vote of 97 to 15. And at a meeting, after some debate respecting signing a printed paper presented to the town, they judged it most prudent to choose a committee to take under consideration the disturbed state of the public affairs; upon which they chose the following men:—Capt. Geo. Bryant, Capt. Seth Cushing, Mr. William Ripley, Dea. Samuel Lucas, Dea. Thomas Savery, Mr. Benjamin Shurtleff and Mr. Josiah Perkins, as a committee to make their report at the time to which this meeting shall be adjourned, as to what method was most prudent for this town to come into relative to the public affairs of this Province. and adjourned to the first Monday in August next, at one of the clock in the afternoon; and there met, and the committee being present made their report which was unanimously accepted and is as followeth.—We, the undersigned, being chose as a committee to take under consideration the precarious state and dangerous situation in which the public affairs of this Province are now under, and which threaten great distress through all the colonies upon the continent.

In the first place we recommend it unto all to be deeply humble before God, under a deep sense of the very aggravated sins which abound in the land in this day of our calamity, which is the foundation cause of all the sorrows and calamities that we feel or fear, and repent and turn to God with our whole hearts, and then we may humbly hope that God will graciously be pleased to return unto us and appear for our deliverance and save us from the distress we are now laboring under, and prevent heavier calamities coming upon us.

We also recommend to this town by no means to be concerned in purchasing or consuming any goods imported from Great Britain after the first day of October next, and until our grievances are removed, and in regard to entering into combination respecting purchasing goods imported from Great Britain, we humbly conceive it would be very imprudent to act anything of that nature until the result of the Congress shall be made public; and upon the report thereof we advise the town to be very active in pursuing the most regular method in order to promote the good of the public, and the flourishing state of the same. Capt. George Bryant, Capt. Seth Cushing, Mr. William Ripley, Dea. Samuel Lucas, Dea. Thomas Savery, Mr. Benjamin Shurtleff, Mr. Josiah Perkins.

It was also voted that the whole proceedings of the town be transmitted to the Town Clerk of Boston, and that the committee that made these reports should remain as a committee, upon which the town added six men, viz:—Mr. Darius Magoun, Mr. Isaiah Cushman, Mr. James Harlow, Mr. John Brigham, Mr. John Shaw, Jr., Mr. Isaac Churchill to consider the result of the Congress when it shall be made public, and make report to the town what may be most prudent for the town to do respecting public affairs.

Some time before the war of the Revolution, after the British Parliament laid a duty on tea, the people combined together and refused to drink tea.

As a substitute for tea, they used what was called Liberty tea in Plympton, which was made of a wild plant called cross-wort, which makes a tea resembling Bohea tea in taste.

A Scotch pedlar, by the name of Frazier, had his tea taken from him in the south part of the town (now Carver) and burned.

In the early part of the war leather jockeys were frequently worn by young men and some others more advanced in age. The brim of the jockey was in an oval form and no brim over each ear. The brim was turned up to the crown before and behind and sometimes a tin plate in front with this inscription, "Liberty or Death."

At a town meeting held May 23, 1776, the town voted unanimously Independence of Great Britain. It seems that the town declared independence before Congress declared it.

The military spirit in the town of Plympton was very active. Before the Revolutionary war there were four military companies in Plympton with the following captains, viz:—Capt. John Bradford, Capt. Thomas Loring, Capt. William Atwood, and Capt. Nathaniel Shaw. These companies, comprising two hundred and twenty-two men, belonged to the 1st Regiment, commanded by Col. Theophilus Cotton, of Plymouth, and of which Seth Cushing, of Plympton, was 2nd Major, were ordered and marched to Marshfield, April 19, 1776, the very day on which the battles of Concord and Lexington were fought.

In the course of the war the town of Plympton furnished enlistments nearly equal in number to one third of its population, counting, of course, the several enlistments of the same soldier.

Coming down to the war of the rebellion, we find the same spirit which animated the fathers, manifest in their sons. For

in obedience to orders received during the night of the 15th of April, 1861, twenty-two men, members of Co. H, of the 3rd Regt. reported on Boston Common, April 16th and left Boston for Fortress Monroe, April 18. Of these twenty-two men only a remnant remains today. Six are living, one I cannot locate, while fifteen have passed on. Benjamin S. Atwood, Josiah E. Atwood, Henry F. Beaton, Jonathan C. Blanchard, Frederick S. Churchill, Alexander L. Churchill, Ezra B. Churchill, Albert A. Darling, William P. Eldridge, Henry K. Ellis, Daniel Foley, Josiah P. Hammond, John Jordan, Ira S. Holmes, Melvin G. Leach, Israel B. Phinney, Lucian L. Perkins, Warren Rickard, Edwin A. Wright, Rufus F. Wright, Oscar E. Washburn, John B. Wright.

Other enlistments followed, so that we were enabled to fill all calls made by the President for troops, until from a population of about 800, 93 men actually performed service. The young men, who enlisted from this place, entered the service from patriotic motives; they were not hired soldiers, but their country was in danger and they gave their services and many of them their lives in its defence.

In looking over some old papers, a short time ago, I came upon a letter written by one of these soldiers, addressed to the ladies, thanking them in behalf of the Company for a box of articles sent for their comfort, breathing the true spirit of loyalty and expressing the hope that the war would soon be over, that they might return to home and friends. Alas! his body rests in an unknown grave on Bull Run's battlefield. Sometime after the war the ladies formed an association for the purpose of raising money to erect a suitable monument or memorial to the soldiers; and after several years of labor they succeeded (the town granting the sum of \$500), in erecting the beautiful monument which stands as an everlasting honor, not only to the soldiers who served their country, but to the ladies who labored so earnestly to secure it.

PUBLIC LIBRARY.

There were some district association and private libraries owned in town, but no public library until 1891, when the town voted to accept the provisions of the law passed by the legislature, granting aid to small towns to establish Free Public Libraries. The first trustees chosen by the town were John Sherman, Mrs. C. M. S. Frazer, Charles H. Perkins.

Soon after this some of the young people formed an association for the purpose of raising money for a library building. Through their efforts and the munificence of Mrs. Pierce and others, they were enabled to furnish that gem of a building of which the town has the free use, and which now contains eighteen hundred volumes for circulation, beside books of reference and unbound magazines in large numbers.

BUSINESS.

Time will not allow of any extended description of the business of the town which at one time was very considerable. Adam Wright came from Middleboro, where his house was burned by the Indians, the exact date we do not know; but his eldest son, John Wright, was born in Plympton in 1680. He built a house on the northwesterly side of the second mill pond, up stream on Winnetuxet river and built a grist mill there. It was the first gristmill in Plympton. The waterwheel with an upright shaft turned horizontally and the millstones turned just as fast as the wheel. It was what was called a gigmill, and was capable of grinding four or five bushels a day. It must have been like the mill where the boy went and becoming impatient waiting for his grist, told the miller he could eat the meal as fast as his mill could grind it. The miller asked him how long he could do so, and he replied "until I starved to death."

There has been on this stream a forge, a rolling mill, shovel works, a cotton factory, a woolen factory, four grist mills and a number of saw mills.

On a branch of Jones river a nail factory and later a tack factory.

There was also, before the Revolution, a furnace where cannon balls were made, afterwards removed to the south part of the town (now Carver), where the first hollow ware in this country was cast.

From one cause and another these industries have departed and about all there is left is a cotton mill, a paper and wooden box manufactory and a few saw mills.

Names of a few who have been prominent in the town and Old Colony:

Rev. Isaac Cushman, the preacher for about thirty-six years.

Rev. Jonathan Parker, whose lineal descendants have been prominently identified in the affairs of the town and Old Colony down to the present day.

Dr. Caleb Loring, the eminent physician; he bought, in 1703, the place now owned and occupied by Miss Lydia A. Wright, and built the western half of the main house and the ell, the eastern half having been built some years previous by Mr. Stephen Bryant, and which is the oldest house now standing in town. He owned a wall pew in the old church, and had a door cut through the wall next to his pew, so that when late at church from attending the sick, or when called out of church for that purpose, he could enter or retire without disturbing the congregation.

William Bradford, a lineal descendant of Governor William Bradford, born in Plympton in 1729, soon after 1750 removed to Bristol, R. I., where he served as Deputy Governor, Speaker of the House of Representatives and U. S. Senator.

Zabdiel Sampson, born in Plympton, in 1781, a graduate of Brown University, removed to Plymouth, chosen a representative to Congress 1816, later appointed Collector of the port of Plymouth, where he died in office in 1828.

Josiah Perkins, Town Clerk for forty years, and a deacon of the church nearly fifty-five years.

Lewis Bradford, chosen Town Clerk in 1812, chosen a deacon of the church in 1814 and clerk about the same time, holding all these offices until his death, which occurred Aug. 10, 1851, by being thrown from a wagon in front of this church.

Rev. Elijah Dexter and Rev. Henry Martyn Dexter, whose mother was the daughter of Nathaniel Morton, of Taunton, and a sister of Gov. Marcus Morton.

Deacon Cephas Bumpus, though not a native, lived here many years and held offices of honor and trust. A representative in the Legislature; a man of sterling worth, and one to whom we boys in the Sunday school, where he was usually superintendent, looked up to with reverence, almost with awe. Our own Josiah Hammond, when a boy, while playing about his home one Sunday morning, looked up and saw old Deacon Bumpus wending his way to church, ran into the house exclaiming to his parents, "Hide me! hide me, God is coming!"

Of the women perhaps I need not speak. We did not furnish a Betsey Ross to make the flag, but we did contribute a Deborah Sampson who fought for two years as a common soldier in its defence, and whose deed of valor and heroism is inscribed on yonder tablet placed by that patriotic order The Daughters of the American Revolution, on that imperishable boulder furnished

by the town. And scores of others no less worthy, no less patriotic, though they did not go to the front, sent their sons, their husbands, their brothers, while they minded affairs at home, refused to drink taxed tea, and wore linsey woolsey garments that their country might be free.

While we cannot boast of many great men, not many mighty, we will not forget that two of her sons sat in the Congress of the nation and helped in shaping the legislation of their country.

That another, whose fame as a scholar, theologian and historical writer is not bounded by our continent, but has crossed the ocean and is held in high repute in other lands.

That another by the faithful and thorough manner with which he has gathered up and recorded the many incidents of the times, and of the early settlers of the Old Colony, has made for himself a monument that shall endure in the hearts of their descendants to the latest generation.

Of others, who have won and are winning distinction at the bar, and in other professions as well as in the marts of business and of trade.

For intelligence, for thrift and enterprise, yea, for patriotism, our ancestors in Plympton will compare favorably with other towns in the Commonwealth.

And if in these later years we seem to have gone backward, it is from the same causes that have almost depopulated scores of the small towns of the state, the concentration of manufactures and trade in the cities and large villages, whither our people have gone with the hope that they may more easily win the battle of life.

But we know that many of them while engaged in the whirl of business, are looking back with love and veneration to the old town that gave them birth and expect when the bustle and turmoil of life are through to mingle their dust in its sacred soil.

LIBRARY OF CONGRES



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